

THE INTERNET 1996 WORLD EXPOSITION

Remarks by Carl Malamud
Chairman of the International Executive Committee

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Last week in Taipei, Mr. Peter Li of the Taiwan Internet Association told me the story of stone soup. You take a stone and put it into a pot and call your friends. You tell your friends come over for the wonderful stone soup, and by the way, would they mind bringing a little beef, or some carrots, or perhaps a chicken or two?

Two years ago, I took a stone and put it into a pot and created my own stone soup. I called this a world's fair for the information age, the Internet 1996 World Exposition. From all over the world people brought their contributions. Over 100 corporations donated 100 million dollars in contributions. Thousands of people from 80 countries put pavilions on-line. Five million people visited the world's fair. Heads of state from the US, Russia, Taiwan, Nepal, and many other countries gave us their formal support. I started with an idea for the first world's fair where anybody could open a pavilion, the first world's fair to take place all over the world, the first world's fair for the information age, but it was people all over the world who made this real.

Time is too short to describe this world's fair in a few minutes, but let me review a few of the highlites. One of our most important goals was to use the exposition as a way to introduce technology to people, to show them what this Internet is and how it will change their lives. Our places in the real world, places where people without the Internet could visit the fair, was one of the most important tools.

In Taiwan, over 1500 computers were donated by the local computer industry and installed in places like the National Palace Museum and the central Taipei train station. In Amsterdam, a castle that dates back to the fifteenth century was turned into the Society for the Study of Old and New Media. In the district of Harajuku in Tokyo, Mr. Joichi Ito and the talented Reiko-san created the Digital City of Harajuku, a place where girls could learn about the Internet and how to build their own home pages.

The places in the real world were supplemented by thousands of on-line pavilions. Mr. Deb K. Roy travelled for months in South America to visit Indian weavers, the Dharamsala in India to learn about Tibetan culture. Ung-Ang Talay put the glories of Thai food and the Aw Taw Kaw market on-line for people around the world to visit. The Sensorium team in Japan created a spectacular pavilion, one that stretched the boundaries of technology, showing us that the Internet can go far beyond an on-line database and can be our window to the world, our link to the earth and to our fellow people around the globe. In the United States, Mr. Martin Lucas showed us the American Midwest through the eyes of the farmers and the natural resources.

Throughout the year, on-line events took place throughout the world. IBM brought us the Kasparov versus Deep Blue Chess Match, an on-line event that brought in millions of people every day. Tod Machover and the MIT Media Lab brought us the Brain Opera, a spectacular use of new technology that debuted at the Lincoln Center Festival and was recently brought to Tokyo by NTT Data and We's Brain in the Yebisu Garden Place. In Singapore, we all took part in a Wheelchair marathon, in Amsterdam we were able to attend the opening of the theater season.

What makes this a real world's fair is more than just our on-line pavilions, our real world places, and our spectacular events. It more than the formal statements from the President of Russia or the Prime Minister of Nepal. It is more than the 5 million people from 120 countries who visited our fair.

The great fairs of the last century all left a legacy behind. They created mammoth infrastructure projects that proved that electricity, or the telephone, or the television were ready for us to use. Our world's fair has done the same on the global Internet.

Central Park, which was host to the world's fair, was created by linking together huge computers in Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, London, Amsterdam, Washington and other locations. Central Park is a public park for the global village. Just as Hyde Park in London was left at the Great Exposition of 1851, our Central Park will remain in place when the fair concludes.

Perhaps our most lasting legacy is the Internet Railroad, a series of high-speed links that have transformed the Internet throughout Asia. KDD and MCI installed a dedicated line from Washington, D.C. to Tokyo, running at 45 million bits per second, the fastest international line at the time. This line was joined to other links to Korea, Taiwan, and other countries throughout Asia, forming the first Asian backbone. This global piece of infrastructure was managed throughout the year by Marten Terpstra and Robin Littlefield of Bay Networks, two of the leading routing engineers in the world. Their leadership was instrumental in creating and managing this global backbone.

The Internet Railroad will conclude at the end of this year, but something magical has happened in the meantime. In Japan, the commercial service providers saw that high-speed international links are viable, that the technology works and the demand is there. Over the course of 1996, the Expo Effect led to a half-dozen commercial links being installed between Tokyo and the United States. In fact, as of last month, the Internet is the leading user of international bandwidth between the two countries, surpassing the combined total of voice and fax. This is a remarkable fact and it is proof that the Internet is here, it works, and it will be an important part of our lives for many years to come.

As I look back on the last year, I feel a sense of surprise and a sense of awe. I am awed by the remarkable outpouring of support from over 100 corporations from around the world. These corporations understand that if we are building a global village, that we must go beyond on-line shopping malls. Real cities combine industry, entertainment, and education. Real cities are complex structures, places where people want to live and work. By pitching to build a public park for the global village, the corporate organizers of this world's fair have helped us to create a place where we will want to visit and to live, they have helped us to create a beautiful city that we can take pride in.

I am also awed by the number of people who helped to create our stone soup. All over the world, people came and contributed. The world's fair is truly a collective enterprise, a community effort. I am grateful for the incredible efforts of these incredible people who have built our public park for the global village and all I can say to all of them is thank you because you have done a wonderful thing, you have created the first world's fair for the information age.